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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2814
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 2198
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000113

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ OPPOSITION, CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS SIGNAL
NEXT STEPS

REF: BISHKEK 71

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Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Kyrgyz opposition leaders continue to express differing opinions on how best to oppose what they see as the increasing authoritarianism of the Bakiyev government. Former MP and Ata Meken party leader Omurbek Tekebayev said he would focus on party building; public protests would be difficult to coordinate under current conditions. Former MP Temir Sariyev is taking "time out;" analyzing the political situation and determining next steps.

As usual, former PM Atambayev predicts there could be trouble ahead and is refusing an Ambassadorial appointment to be on the spot in case he's right. Former MP and Asaba party leader Azimbek Beknazarov, however, says opposition groups have exhausted all political and legal means and is forming a "revolutionary committee" of likeminded parties. How much of that familiar rhetoric will come to pass depends, once again, upon the opposition uniting and establishing the leadership to inspire a disaffected but disgruntled public and amassing the resources needed to put real pressure on the government. End Summary.

Frustrated, but Not Giving Up

¶2. (C) Ex-opposition MP and Ata Meken party leader Omurbek Tekebayev told the Ambassador January 30 that, despite being excluded from parliament in the December elections, his party would continue to strengthen its base through local council elections. As a result of the Bakiyev family's apparent control over industry, parliament, and the courts, said Tekebayev, the space for political activity has diminished significantly. He claimed that Bakiyev's son and brother, Maxim and Janysh, controlled rival groups bent on taking over as many of Kyrgyzstan's major economic assets as possible, and that criminal elements have permeated the Kyrgyz White House, enabling such takeovers.

13. (C) Despite the pessimistic outlook, Tekebayev said that many remain hopeful that the situation will improve over time. He said others have approached him to organize mass protests against the government, but he admitted that it would be difficult to bring out large crowds without the support of a unified opposition. He added that, apart from politics, many are unhappy because of electricity blackouts, caused primarily by the government's mismanagement of the energy sector.

Wait and See

14. (C) In a January 29 meeting with the Ambassador, ex-MP Temir Sariyev said he was taking a two-month break from politics to analyze current events. Sariyev predicted that the government's handling of economic development issues, as well as civil society's ability to gain traction regarding the parliamentary election fraud, would help determine the opposition's next steps. He also said that if opposition groups decide to hold mass protests, they will not abide by the new restrictions on where and when public protests can be held, adding that protestors wouldn't "stop at the square" anyway.

Trouble Ahead

15. (C) In a January 31 meeting with the Ambassador, former Prime Minister Atambayev criticized the consolidation of power in the president's (read family's) hands, but also believed that the Kyrgyz people would not allow the present situation to last for long. He predicted that presidential elections would be the likely flash point. Atambayev said he

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sensed more trouble could be ahead, and so -- at least for now -- has turned down an Ambassadorial appointment to Ankara.

A More Radical Approach

16. (C) Sariyev said that the government's "Soviet-style" intimidation tactics had scared off some opposition supporters, but had infuriated others. He claimed that ex-MP and Asaba party leader Azimbek Beknazarov was becoming "more radical," and that other disenfranchised ex-government officials, including former PMs Almaz Atambayev and Felix Kulov, were joining him.

17. (SBU) Beknazarov told the press January 24 that opposition groups have exhausted all political and legal means to effect democratic change. He said that "numerous" likeminded political parties would establish a "revolutionary committee" and organize mass protests to call for President Bakiyev's immediate resignation. He added that he hoped that large demonstrations would occur on March 24, the third anniversary of the "tulip revolution."

Comment

18. (C) Beknazarov's fiery rhetoric notwithstanding, Kyrgyz opposition leaders seem dispirited and disunited. While the government's harassment of opposition supporters and civil society groups has angered many, it has also been effective. Ex-MP Kubatbek Baibolov has already said that he is leaving the political arena (reftel), and others may follow him. One civil society leader told us that Tekebayev is trying to cut a private deal with the White House: if the government doesn't touch his property, then he will stay quiet. Another source told us that Sariyev's "two-month break" from politics was just a prelude to leaving politics altogether.

19. (C) It is hard to imagine that Tekebayev and Sariyev plan

to withdraw from active politics completely, but the government's tactics have forced them -- and others in politics and civil society -- to spend a great deal of time protecting their personal interests. It is obvious the pressure continues and opposition party leaders are keeping a low profile. For now, it is civil society members who are protesting the government's actions, but when the timing is right we expect that the political parties will re-enter the fray. End Comment.

YOVANOVITCH